United Nations A/49/PV.1

General Assembly
Forty-ninth Session

Official Records

1st Meeting
Tuesday, 20 September 1994, 3 p.m.
New York

Temporary President: Mr. Insanally ..... (Guyana)

The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda
Opening of the session by the Chairman of the delegation of Guyana

The Temporary President: I declare open the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda
Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President: Before calling on representatives to observe a minute of silent prayer or meditation in accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I propose that as we do so we also observe the International Day of Peace, on this third Tuesday of September, as proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/67 of 30 November 1981, to be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples.

I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Item 115 of the provisional agenda
Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (Article 19 of the Charter) (A/49/400)

The Temporary President: Before turning to the next item on our agenda, I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/49/400, which has been circulated in the General Assembly Hall this afternoon. It contains a letter addressed to me by the Secretary-General in which he informs the Assembly that 14 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial obligations to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda
Credentials of representatives to the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly (rule 28):

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

94-86364 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one week of the date of publication*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Section, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum. When the result of a recorded and/or roll-call vote is followed by an asterisk, see annex to the record.

The Temporary President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly at the beginning of each session shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that, for the forty-ninth session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: China, Fiji, Honduras, Namibia, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Surinam, Togo and the United States of America.

May I take it that the States I have mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Election of the President of the General Assembly

The Temporary President: I now invite members of the General Assembly to proceed to the election of the President of the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

May I recall that, in accordance with paragraph 1 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 33/138, the President of the General Assembly at the forty-ninth session should be elected from an African State.

In this connection, I have been informed by the Chairman of the Group of African States that the Group has endorsed the candidacy of Mr. Amara Essy of Côte d'Ivoire for the presidency of the General Assembly.

Taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of annex VI to the rules of procedure, I therefore declare His Excellency Mr. Amara Essy of Côte d'Ivoire elected President of the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session by acclamation.

I extend my very sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Amara Essy, and I invite him now to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Essy took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Amara Essy, President of the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session

The President *(interpretation from French)*: As I assume the presidency of the General Assembly of the United Nations at its forty-ninth session, I wish first of all to express my warmest thanks for the confidence the Assembly has placed in me and for the tribute being paid, through me, to my country and the whole of Africa. I am aware that on assuming this lofty office I accept both a great honour and a weighty responsibility. I shall try with all my heart to fulfil this responsibility completely, as my predecessor, Mr. Samuel Insanally, did so well.

Over the last 12 months, Mr. Insanally gave new impetus to the work of the General Assembly and contributed to relaunching our thoughts and our action in the field of development and international cooperation. As his successor, I shall strive to maintain the spirit of harmony and dialogue with which the forty-eighth session was imbued. In the accomplishment of my exciting but delicate mission, I have no doubt that I shall enjoy the support of the Member States and the Secretariat, which support, I am certain, will be unstinting. I, for my part, should like to offer assurances of my complete readiness to exert every effort to conclude our work successfully.

As feelings of exhilaration and resolve to achieve our goals mingle within us, my first thoughts turn to Africa and my country, Côte d'Ivoire, whose values are reflected in those of the international community, the vibrant symbol of which is the United Nations. Côte d'Ivoire, which I had the great honour of representing here for a number of years, has always affirmed its dedication to international cooperation and has always devoted itself to the work of our Organization. How can thoughts of this work, based on the values of peace, tolerance, dialogue, human dignity, justice, equity and solidarity, not call to mind the name of Félix Houphouët-Boigny? The teachings of the first President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, have given me strength, and in the exercise of my responsibilities I shall keep in mind his political message, which is so closely related to that proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations. His legacy, upon which Côte d'Ivoire was founded as a State based on the rule of law, remains intact.

Thus, the remarkable transition that took place in Côte d'Ivoire through the strict application of

constitutional law fills us with legitimate pride. The democratic process, which saw His Excellency Mr. Henri Konan Bédié take office as President of our Republic, proved to the world the degree of maturity of our people. Worthy successor of the colossal work of his illustrious predecessor, economist of distinction, career diplomat and politician, President Henri Konan Bédié is completely in touch with the problems of our day. In facing up to the challenges confronting our world, he will soon be making an enlightened contribution in the international community.

The fast pace of historic events since the end of the cold war has so blurred our guidelines as to make it necessary for us to insist on, or even demand, the implementation of the fundamental principles upon which the United Nations was established in 1945. This gives an indication of how very valid the San Francisco Charter remains today. In saying this, I am aware that considerable changes have taken place on the international scene over the past five decades, and I know there have been profound changes in our Organization as well, not least of which is the almost quadruplication of the number of Members. Of course, such upheavals force us to adapt gradually the functions, the mission and the working methods of our Organization, as, indeed, we have begun to do. However, lest the United Nations take the path of obsolescence, the changes taking place must be fully in keeping with the Charter of 26 June 1945.

At a time when national self-interests assert themselves and virtues of solidarity are on the wane, the United Nations remains the last recourse. Hence, the solidarity and cooperation on which the Charter is based must inspire our actions. It is up to us, the representatives of the Member States in the General Assembly, essential organ of the Organization, to gauge the expectations, the hopes and the urgent needs of our peoples and to respond to them correctly. The challenges to be taken up, whose complexity is all the greater because of their interrelatedness, are manifold and unforeseeable. The idea of solidarity must take on all its meaning, then, if we are to ensure the building of a true community of nations.

The passage from the end of ideological confrontation to the establishment of a world of peace and a shared destiny is hardly an easy one. The tendencies seen since the end of the cold war, the most evident of which is the proliferation of civil war, seem to be gaining strength. Of 82 conflicts over the last three years, 79 have been internal conflicts, and in cases such as those of the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda they have led to systematic policies of "ethnic cleansing", and even genocide.

But those conflicts are but one aspect of the way our world is going. In countries of the northern and southern hemispheres alike, we are witnessing rising intolerance and xenophobia, in short fear of that which is different, of all differences: skin colour, language, ethnicity and sex. Consider, furthermore, the many frustrations, both individual and collective, that result from the spread of poverty, exclusion and social injustice. Where human misery grows, threats to the security of our world also spring forth: the degradation of the environment, the depletion of natural resources, the speeding up of the rural exodus, the growth of shanty towns on the peripheries of large metropolitan centres, urban violence, the disintegration of the social fabric and drug abuse. International terrorism, nuclear proliferation, the spread of pandemics, unemployment, famine, natural disasters, uncontrolled population growth - all are on the list of today's concerns. Of course, many of these global threats are not new. Some were hidden away and contained under the oppression and silence during the cold war. Now they are re-emerging in forms that are most alarming for mankind.

Fortunately, the end of the cold war promoted the return of peace among nations. And how can we not take delight in the considerable progress achieved towards peace? The situation in the Middle East, Palestine's recovery of authority over Gaza and Jericho, the agreement recently signed between Israel and Jordan, and mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) are the most striking illustrations of this. The ultimate outcome of this process should be the conclusion of global peace based on respect for the national rights of the Palestinians and the normalization of relations among all the States of the region.

How can we fail to refer to the great hope that was aroused in South Africa in April 1994 with the organization of free and pluralist elections, which sealed the fate of what had been the bastion of racism and apartheid and had, for decades, constituted an affront to the universal conscience? This is an appropriate time to welcome the role played by the United Nations in a struggle in which the fundamental stakes were nothing less than the dignity of the human person.

Let us also express the hope that the dialogue that is emerging in Ireland will bring peace to that long-suffering land.

And, in the past few hours, the prospects for the restoration of constitutional legality in Haiti have become increasingly real. The implementation of Security Council resolution 940 (1994) reflects the fact that law can triumph over force and indulgence and that democratic legitimacy can prevail over political arbitrariness.

The new international situation is favourable to the role of the United Nations, which is emerging as the ideal organ for promotion of the will of the international community to work towards the building of peace and the pursuit of sustainable human development. These two objectives are indissociable and interdependent, as was affirmed by the Secretary-General in his "Agenda for Peace" (A/47/277) and in his draft "Agenda for Development" (A/47/935). He said that peace was as essential for development as development was for peace. I for my part would add that there can be no lasting internal peace without the establishment of a State ruled by law.

The moral values reaffirmed at the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in June 1993 inspired the adoption of measures promoting democratization and the recognition of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The establishment of an office of High Commissioner for Human Rights certainly has positive aspects as regards the protection and promotion of human rights. It would however be necessary to beware of falling back into the trap of blindly copying others, a trap which, when the African countries were becoming independent in 1960, led to the copying of external political models without taking into account the historical, sociological or cultural parameters of the recipient countries.

It is good to recognize the active role of participatory movements in the consolidation of democracy and peace. The wave of democratization that we have been witnessing since 1989 remains very fragile because it concerns, basically, the developing countries. If the democratic process does not soon succeed in quenching the thirst for justice and equity among the disinherited populations of our world, it is to be feared that uncontrollable situations may arise and curb democracy. What, indeed, would it mean to those populations if the values of peace, liberty, justice and equality were only words and pointless abstractions, and if they were not to lead to a concrete improvement in their living conditions?

In its constant concern to promote and ensure peace our Organization is prompted to undertake commendable actions, and, in recent years, these have significantly intensified. The mixed reactions that peace-keeping interventions sometimes arouse should not prevent us from paying a tribute to our Organization for its efforts in this field.

In less than four years we have witnessed a real revolution in the mode of intervention by the United Nations. Never has the Organization been called upon so often to put an end to conflict, to defuse crises or to undertake the quest for political solutions. It has, over the years and through the experience it has accumulated in various areas, demonstrated an enormous capacity to adapt to the complex situations it must face. Nevertheless, it is in vogue to criticize the United Nations, even though the responsibility of its Member States is directly engaged in its actions.

Have we always been aware of the consequences of the decisions we have taken? Have we not acted on the basis of specific interests? There is a need for a frank debate on questions relating to the maintenance of peace and international security. In this framework, cooperation between the United Nations and the regional organizations is essential, and the efforts made by the Secretary-General towards this end should be commended. Cooperation with the Organization of African Unity and subregional organizations has been strengthened. It would be appropriate to continue this effort with a view to better coordination of action in the field of the prevention and settlement of disputes.

The General Assembly is the depositary of the interests of the international community. Hence, any exercise with regard to restructuring the organs of our Organization would gain from being conducted in harmony with the General Assembly. But as I see it, the most important thing is still the work of the United Nations with a view to development.

Any thinking concerning this field necessarily has as a backdrop a prior assessment of the international economic system, whose institutional foundations were laid at the end of the Second World War. Fifty years later, and in the light of the upheaval in the world economy, it is clear that this system is in need of renewal. Ambitious projects for global reordering in the past have led nowhere. The most glaring failure was undoubtedly the North-South summit meeting held in Cancún in October 1981, one of the promoters of which recently stated that the decisions taken at that time

"confronted immense interests and remained virtually a dead letter".

The establishment of the World Trade Organization, decided upon at the conclusion of the Uruguay Round should none the less be highlighted. That organization is called upon to become one of the regulatory forums in the field of trade, for which the international economy feels a pressing need. Likewise, further thought should be given to the tasks and functions of organizations in the Bretton Woods group, as well as to the concept of global economic security.

Taking into account disparities in levels of development - and I should like to recall that the countries of the North have one fifth of the world's population, while they receive four fifths of its income - we could rightly have thought that the end of the cold war would coincide with an unprecedented mobilization of the international community in favour of development. This is all the more true since a constant reduction in military expenditures the world over since 1987 - about 3.6 per cent per year - has made it possible to release, by way of peace dividends, revenues amounting today to $936 billion.

These considerable sums have, unfortunately, not been allocated to development. Far from meeting the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP, official development assistance has regressed and fallen from 0.38 per cent of GNP in 1980 to 0.33 per cent in 1992-1993. According to a report of the Secretary-General, in May 1994, issued at the request of the Assembly, a general decline of 10 to 20 per cent in voluntary contributions received by the agencies and programmes of the United Nations development programmes has been recorded. I would add to this that the exponential growth in financing for peace-keeping operations and emergency assistance has greatly affected United Nations efforts in the field of development. More than two thirds of the $7 billion received in 1992 by the United Nations system (not taking into account the Bretton Woods group of organizations) was therefore allocated to peace-keeping operations and humanitarian assistance. It should be stressed that, in 1992, the developing countries paid $160 billion by way of debt reimbursement - in other words, two and a half times the amount of the aid from which they had benefited.

In the light of this situation, it can be understood that my predecessor, Mr. Insanally, noted a very widespread feeling of disenchantment and disappointment regarding the work of the United Nations in the field of development.

Paradoxically, what we usually refer to as donor fatigue coincides with a fruitful period of renewal in the methods, approaches and strategies of the United Nations system in the field of cooperation for development. I would mention only a few of the most significant examples of this.

Since 1990, when it first appeared, the annual report of the United Nations Development Programme on human development has been attempting to go beyond abstract statistics and to convey an idea of the realities of development in the daily lives of individuals.

In the field of operational activities, we have witnessed considerable progress with an integrated approach at the national level, which, *inter alia*, is intended, through the establishment of thorough dialogue with the authorities in the countries concerned, to better identify the sectoral priorities, to coordinate the activities of the various donors and to promote the national implementation of development projects.

Through innovative approaches such as those based on the concept of sustainable development and of human security, which will be further elaborated and enriched by the debate under way on the Agenda for Development, the United Nations will now be able to show its capacity to respond to the global challenges I have mentioned. This is supported by the recent conclusions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the more recent International Conference on Population and Development. The forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, to be held in Copenhagen in March 1995, will also make it possible to have a concept of development based on human security prevail.

Although the United Nations has achieved considerable progress, difficulties persist in financing programmes adopted within the framework of Agenda 21, and this raises questions as to whether the donor countries have kept all of their commitments.

I cannot conclude my comments on development without mentioning in particular the case of Africa, with 90 per cent of the least developed countries. Africa is literally a martyred continent, because it has always suffered, and still suffers, from abject poverty, natural disasters, migration and mass exodus and ideological mind-sets that justify internal oppression and sometimes genocide. The international media's approach to Africa swings from compassion to voyeurism to weariness. How

many times have I heard or read in the course of recent years that my continent is a continent adrift, a continent in distress, a continent in agony.

In spite of this negative picture, I am convinced that the trends that we have seen since the crisis of the 1980s can be reversed. In spite of its many open wounds - in particular in Angola, Liberia, Rwanda and Somalia - Africa is regaining its confidence and is dedicated to designing for itself the broad lines of its future.

Africa is now aware of the multidimensional challenges confronting it and of the strategies to be implemented in order to meet those challenges. We must continue our efforts in the ongoing projects in our Organization, some of which are in the implementation phase. I have in mind in particular the United Nations Development Programme for Africa and its corollary, the commodities diversification Fund, which must be given further consideration.

Together with the liberalization of our economies, we must see an opening of new political areas that can ensure the participation of our populations. This is another challenge that the African countries in the main have been able to meet in the present decade. Single-party regimes have today become the exception on our continent, while pluralism is becoming the rule. Civil societies are becoming stronger and are taking root everywhere. Most Governments are holding free and pluralist elections. Separation of powers is becoming more effective. In other words, the principle of responsibility of African leaders *vis-à-vis* their peoples is being affirmed everywhere, under the attentive eye of a diverse and flourishing press. Of course, the path towards pluralism is not always an easy one. Political forces often find it hard to free themselves of a system inherited from single-party regimes, and freedom of information is not always well understood. None the less, in only a few years, democracy has made remarkable headway in Africa.

It is on the basis of this stabilization effort, both economic and political, that Africa is tackling other challenges - in particular, the challenge of protecting the environment, an area in which the African peoples, through their traditional communion with nature, are becoming increasingly aware of the ecological stakes.

Victims for many centuries of the slave trade, of colonization, of the clash of civilizations, Africans, in their united resistance, have always dreamed of unity. In the face of the great political, economic and cultural groupings taking root in other parts of the world, the African States have laid the foundations for regional and subregional integration. We must move resolutely forward and translate into reality the plan adopted by the Organization of African Unity in June 1991, that of an African economic community. The march towards the economic and political integration of the continent will also provide a solution to the political problems engendered by colonization which left us with borders that were referred to by Félix Houphouët-Boigny as the "indelible scars of history".

Africa, as can be readily seen, is neither resigned nor apathetic in the face of its immense difficulties. It is asserting itself and assuming its own responsibilities, taking in hand its destiny by designing its own solutions - not, however, without the active support of the international community.

At a time when the African peoples are accepting to make the most enormous sacrifices, the international community should not yield to disenchantment or to weariness. More than ever, the solidarity of peoples must be affirmed and bear fruit. Hence I should like to recall the words of former Japanese Prime Minister Mr. Hosokawa, who, in a statement before the International Conference on Africa in Tokyo, referred to a Japanese proverb, as follows:

> "A single arrow can easily break, but three arrows put together do not break".

He added:

> "The key to the solution of the problems facing Africa might be found in these three arrows: the efforts of African Governments, the active participation of African peoples and the warm support of the international community".

The year 1995 will be a watershed for our Organization. In addition to the commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary and the United Nations Year for Tolerance, the United Nations will be convening a World Summit for Social Development and the World Conference on Women. These various gatherings should result in commitments paired with specific measures to promote the human person and international solidarity.

I am convinced that the Member States will be able to bring the United Nations in line with today's needs and

challenges. In saying this, I cannot fail to think of the words of the French writer Albert Camus:

> "Able as they were to do all things, they ventured to do so little".

Let us see to it that future generations never pass such a judgement on us for having failed to assume our obligations towards our peoples, whose general will is embodied and represented in the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.